

Message Text

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SUBJ: ALP PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS SUPPORTS CHANGE IN PREFERENCE

VOTING SYSTEM AND REDISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL ELECTORATES

1. SUMMARY: LABOR PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS SEPT 18 APPROVED PROPOSAL TO ADOPT OPTIONAL PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEM AND REDISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL ELECTORATES FOR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. MEASURES, IF THEY ENTER INTO EFFECT, COULD HAVE CONSIDERABLE IMPACT ON SYSTEM OF VOTING IN AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, IT IS EXPECTED THAT BOTH MEASURES WILL BE BLOCKED IN SENATE. MOTIVE OF ALP IN SUPPORTING TWO PROPOSALS IS MIXTURE OF SINCERE CONVICTION THAT CHANGES ARE PROPER AND DEMOCRATIC AND OF NARROW PARTY CALCULATION THAT ALP WILL BENEFIT FROM CHANGES. END SUMMARY

2. AT MEETING IN CANBERRA SEPT 18, ALP PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS APPROVED PROPOSAL BY MINISTER FOR SERVICES AND PROPERTY, FRED DALY, TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO AUTHORIZE OPTIONAL PREFERENTIAL VOTING SYSTEM FOR THE NEXT HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE AND SENATE ELECTIONS. CAUCUS ALSO APPROVED EARLY ACTION BY GOVERNMENT TO REDISTRIBUTE FEDERAL ELECTORATES BY END OF 1974. PRIME MINISTER WILL NAME COMMISSIONERS TO REDRAW ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES AND GIVE THEM TERMS OF REFERENCE IN PERFORMING THIS TASK.

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3. COMMENT: PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE OPTIONAL RATHER THAN MANDATORY

PREFERENTIAL VOTING HAS LONG BEEN DISCUSSED AND HAS PERSONAL SUPPORT OF PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM. VOTERS PRESENTLY MUST FILL IN BALLOTS WITH NUMBERS INSTEAD OF X-MARK IN FRONT OF NAME OF CANDIDATE OF THEIR CHOICE. ALL BOXES IN FRONT OF CANDIDATES' NAMES MUST BE FILLED IN, WITH NUMERICAL SEQUENCE SHOWING VOTER'S CHOICE. IF THERE ARE 10 CANDIDATES FOR GIVEN POSITION, VOTER MUST RANK THEM FROM ONE TO 10 IN A SEQUENCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS WISHES.

4. OPTIONAL PREFERENTIAL SYSTEM WOULD REQUIRE VOTER TO VOTE ONLY FOR NUMBER OF POSITIONS TO BE FILLED. IN ELECTION FOR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FOR EXAMPLE, VOTER WOULD ONLY HAVE TO VOTE FOR ONE CANDIDATE, INSTEAD OF RANKING ALL CANDIDATES IN NUMERICAL ORDER, AS AT PRESENT. IT IS FREELY PREDICTED THAT OPTIONAL PREFERENTIAL SYSTEM WOULD HAVE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF WIPING OUT PREFERENTIAL SYSTEM ENTIRELY, AS IT IS WIDELY ASSUMED THAT VOTERS WOULD PREFER TO VOTE ONLY FOR ONE CANDIDATE IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND FOR FIVE CANDIDATES FOR SENATE IN REGULAR TRIENNIAL ELECTIONS. IT IS ALSO WIDELY ASSUMED THAT EFFECT OF OPTIONAL PREFERENTIAL SYSTEM WOULD BE TO FORCE REDUCTION OF AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL PARTIES TO ONLY TWO MAJOR PARTIES, LOOSELY CALLED "LABOR" AND "NON-LABOR" FOR SAKE OF CONVENIENCE.

5. COUNTRY PARTY LEADER ANTHONY HAS IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED PROPOSAL FOR OPTIONAL PREFERENCE VOTING, AND IT IS WIDELY PREDICTED THAT PROPOSAL WILL BE DEFEATED IN SENATE. EVEN IF MAVERICK SENATOR STEELE HALL VOTED WITH LABOR SENATORS ON PROPOSAL, MEASURE WILL FAIL IF LIBERAL SENATORS DECIDE TO REJECT IT. SENATOR TOWNLEY (INDEPENDENT, TASMANIA) ANNOUNCED SEPT 19 HE WILL REJOIN LIBERAL PARTY AFTER NEXT SCHEDULED SENATE ELECTIONS AND WOULD THEN BE SUBJECT TO USUAL PARTY DISCIPLINE. HOWEVER, THIS IS ONLY DETAIL, AS TOWNLEY HAS VOTED WITH LIBERAL-COUNTRY SENATORS ON ALL BUT A FRACTION OF ISSUES.

6. ON ELECTORAL REDISTRIBUTION, WHICH WAS MADE NECESSARY BY LEGISLATION APPROVED AT JOINT SITTING IN AUGUST, NEW BOUNDARIES MUST BE APPROVED BY RESOLUTION IN HOUSE AND SENATE BEFORE THEY TAKE EFFECT. IT IS WIDELY PREDICTED THAT REDISTRIBUTION WILL BE REJECTED BY SENATE, MEANING THAT NEXT ELECTION WILL BE FOUGHT ON PRESENT BOUNDARIES, BUT PERHAPS WITH QUESTION OF NEW LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BOUNDARIES MAJOR TOPIC OF CONTENTION.

7. LABOR PARTY IS SUPPORTING PROPOSALS FOR ADOPTION OF OPTIONAL PREFERENCE SYSTEM AND RELOCATION OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES FOR REASONS WHICH ARE A MIXTURE OF SINCERE CONVICTION THAT CHANGES ARE PROPER AND DEMOCRATIC AND OF NARROW PARTY CALCULATIONS THAT ALP WILL BENEFIT FROM CHANGES.

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